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| 10/049,188 | 02/08/2002 | Tomoaki Yoshida | Q63028 | 8127 |

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EXAMINER

CANTELMO, GREGG

| | |
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| ART UNIT | PAPER NUMBER |
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1745

DATE MAILED: 09/19/2005

Please find below and/or attached an Office communication concerning this application or proceeding.

Office Action Summary

Application No.

10/049,188

Applicant(s)

YOSHIDA ET AL.

Examiner

Gregg Cantelmo

Art Unit

1745

-- The MAILING DATE of this communication appears on the cover sheet with the correspondence address --

Period for Reply

A SHORTENED STATUTORY PERIOD FOR REPLY IS SET TO EXPIRE 3 MONTH(S) OR THIRTY (30) DAYS, WHICHEVER IS LONGER, FROM THE MAILING DATE OF THIS COMMUNICATION.

- Extensions of time may be available under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136(a). In no event, however, may a reply be timely filed after SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- If NO period for reply is specified above, the maximum statutory period will apply and will expire SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- Failure to reply within the set or extended period for reply will, by statute, cause the application to become ABANDONED (35 U.S.C. § 133). Any reply received by the Office later than three months after the mailing date of this communication, even if timely filed, may reduce any earned patent term adjustment. See 37 CFR 1.704(b).

Status

- 1) ☒ Responsive to communication(s) filed on Amendment 3/21/05 and RCE 6/21/05.
- 2a) ☐ This action is **FINAL**. 2b) ☒ This action is non-final.
- 3) ☐ Since this application is in condition for allowance except for formal matters, prosecution as to the merits is closed in accordance with the practice under *Ex parte Quayle*, 1935 C.D. 11, 453 O.G. 213.

Disposition of Claims

- 4) ☒ Claim(s) 1-6, 9-12, 14-24 and 26-30 is/are pending in the application.
- 4a) Of the above claim(s) 2-6, 9-12, 14-16 and 28 is/are withdrawn from consideration.
- 5) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are allowed.
- 6) ☒ Claim(s) 1, 17-24, 26, 27, 29 and 30 is/are rejected.
- 7) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are objected to.
- 8) ☐ Claim(s) _____ are subject to restriction and/or election requirement.

Application Papers

- 9) ☐ The specification is objected to by the Examiner.
- 10) ☐ The drawing(s) filed on _____ is/are: a) ☐ accepted or b) ☐ objected to by the Examiner.
Applicant may not request that any objection to the drawing(s) be held in abeyance. See 37 CFR 1.85(a).
Replacement drawing sheet(s) including the correction is required if the drawing(s) is objected to. See 37 CFR 1.121(d).
- 11) ☐ The oath or declaration is objected to by the Examiner. Note the attached Office Action or form PTO-152.

Priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119

- 12) ☐ Acknowledgment is made of a claim for foreign priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(a)-(d) or (f).
- a) ☐ All b) ☐ Some * c) ☐ None of:
- ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received.
 - ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received in Application No. _____.
 - ☐ Copies of the certified copies of the priority documents have been received in this National Stage application from the International Bureau (PCT Rule 17.2(a)).

* See the attached detailed Office action for a list of the certified copies not received.

Attachment(s)

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Notice of References Cited (PTO-892) | 4) <input type="checkbox"/> Interview Summary (PTO-413) Paper No(s)/Mail Date. _____ |
| 2) <input type="checkbox"/> Notice of Draftsperson's Patent Drawing Review (PTO-948) | 5) <input type="checkbox"/> Notice of Informal Patent Application (PTO-152) |
| 3) <input type="checkbox"/> Information Disclosure Statement(s) (PTO-1449 or PTO/SB/08) Paper No(s)/Mail Date _____ | 6) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

DETAILED ACTION

Continued Examination Under 37 CFR 1.114

1. A request for continued examination under 37 CFR 1.114, including the fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(e), was filed in this application after final rejection. Since this application is eligible for continued examination under 37 CFR 1.114, and the fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(e) has been timely paid, the finality of the previous Office action has been withdrawn pursuant to 37 CFR 1.114. Applicant's submission filed on June 21, 2005 has been entered.

Response to Amendment

2. In response to the amendment received March 21, 2005, entered as per the RCE received June 21, 2005:

- a. Claims 1-6, 9-12, 14- 24 and 26-30 are pending. Claims 7, 8, 13 and 25 have been cancelled as per Applicant's request. Claims 2-6, 9-12, 14-16 and 28 have been withdrawn from consideration (non-elected claims from the previous restriction). Action on the merits of claims 1, 17-24, 26, 27 and 29-30 is provided herein;
- b. The issue regarding the claim to priority stands in the absence of the missing parts identified in the previous office action and restated in item 3 herein;
- c. The 112 rejection has been withdrawn in light of the amendments to the claims;
- d. The prior art 102 rejection set forth in the previous office action has been withdrawn in light of the amendment to claim 1;

Art Unit: 1745

- e. The rejections of EP '637 in view of JP '571, Nishimura and Fischer stand.

Priority

- 3. As set forth in the previous office actions:

This application claims benefit to a provisional application No. 60/308,855, filed on August 1 2001 , in a language other than English. Applications that claim benefit of a provisional application filed in a non-English language must include an English translation of the non-English language provisional application and a statement that the translation is accurate. See 37 CFR 1.78(a)(5). The English translation and a statement that the translation is accurate as required by 37 CFR 1.78(a)(5) is missing. Applicant must supply the missing English translation and a statement that the translation is accurate in the reply to this Office action prior to the expiration of the time period set in this Office action.

Response to Arguments

- 4. Applicant's arguments filed June 17, 2004 have been fully considered but they are not persuasive.

- a. Applicant states that a translation of this provisional application was filed directly in the provisional Application itself.

A review of the U.S. patent Office file regarding Provisional Application No. 60/308,855 failed to include any such translation.

- b. Applicant additionally states that the response provided June 17, 2004 includes a copy of the stamped filing receipt acknowledging item 4a above.

However the response of June 17, 2004 received by the U.S. Patent Office does not include any such copy.

c. Applicant additionally states that the response provided March 21, 2005 includes a copy of the stamped filing receipt acknowledging item 4a above.

However the response of March 21, 2005 received by the U.S. Patent Office does not include any such copy.

Thus the written record fails to have clearly established priority to this provisional application.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

The following is a quotation of 35 U.S.C. 103(a) which forms the basis for all obviousness rejections set forth in this Office action:

(a) A patent may not be obtained though the invention is not identically disclosed or described as set forth in section 102 of this title, if the differences between the subject matter sought to be patented and the prior art are such that the subject matter as a whole would have been obvious at the time the invention was made to a person having ordinary skill in the art to which said subject matter pertains. Patentability shall not be negated by the manner in which the invention was made.

2. Claims 1, 17, 18, 21-24, 26, 27, 29 and 30 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over EP 184638-A2 (EP '638) in view of JP 62-287571-A (JP '571) and U.S. patent No. 6,489,026 (Nishimura) and either U.S. Patent No. 6,013,311 (Hager), U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2002/0051903 (Masuko) or U.S. Patent No. 6,447,950 (Iijima) .

EP '638 discloses a fuel cell and membrane electrode assembly (MEA) wherein the MEA comprises an electrolyte membrane 11, an electrode 3 or 8 including a catalyst layer 5 or 10, respectively, and gas diffusion layer 4 or 9, respectively, with the electrodes being provide on each surface of the electrolyte membrane 11 wherein at

least a portion of the gas diffusion layers 4 and 9 are in contact with the catalyst layers 5 and 10, respectively and include a hydrophobic resin (polytetrafluoroethylene) and carbon fibers (Fig. 1 and abstract as applied to claims 1, 17, 21 and 29). Separators 1 and 6 sandwich the MEA (Fig. 1 as applied to claim 29).

The catalyst layer, including the boundary between the catalyst layer and gas diffusion layer includes conductive particles such as carbon black which is applied to the electrodes in the form of a paste. Since the gas diffusion electrode is porous, at least a portion of the catalyst paste will penetrate the boundary between the gas diffusion layers and catalyst paste layers (paragraph bridging pages 13 and 14, page 28 and page 29 as applied to claims 18 and 21).

The resin is polytetrafluoroethylene (abstract as applied to claim 27).

The arrangement is provided in a fuel cell stack and thus comprises layering at least 2 cells together (page 1 and paragraph bridging pages 16 and 17 of EP '638 as applied to claim 30).

The differences between claims 1, 17, 21-24, 26 and 29 and EP '638 are that EP '638 does not disclose of the carbon fiber being a graphitized vapor grown carbon fiber (VGCF) having a fiber filament of 10-300 nm (claims 1, 17, 21, 22 and 29); of forming the fiber through heat treatment at a temperature of at least 2000°C (claim 23), of the fiber containing boron in an amount from 0.01-10mass% (claim 24), of the fiber having a filament length of less than 100 microns (claim 26).

With respect to the vapor grown carbon fiber having a fiber filament of 10-300 nm (claims 1, 17, 21, 22 and 29):

Art Unit: 1745

JP '571 discloses a gas diffusion electrode in a fuel cell wherein the electrode comprises PTFE and vapor grown carbon fibers having a fiber filament of 200-500 Angstroms, or 20-50 nm (abstract and underscored text on page 323 of JP '571 as applied to claims 1, 17, 21, 22 and 29). Nishimura discloses vapor grown carbon fibers in a electrodes wherein the fibers are dimensioned from 0.01-1 micron (col. 5, ll. 53-56), preferably 0.5 microns or less (col. 6, ll. 5-6 as applied to claims 1, 17, 21, 22 and 29).

The motivation for using the gas diffusion layer of JP '571 is that it improves the gas permeability and electrical conductivity of the gas diffusion layer.

Therefore it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the claimed invention was made to modify the teachings of EP '638 by using the gas diffusion layer as taught by JP '571 since it would have improved the gas permeability and electrical conductivity of the gas diffusion layer.

With respect to the % mass of the carbon fiber (claim 22):

Nishimura discloses vapor grown carbon fibers used in electrodes wherein the fibers are present in the electrode in an amount up to 20 mass % (col. 11, ll. 48-54).

The motivation for providing up to 20 mass % of the vapor grown carbon in the electrode layer is that it optimizes the charge-discharge capacity of the battery produced.

Therefore it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the claimed invention was made to modify the teachings of EP '638 by providing up to 20 mass % of the vapor grown carbon in the electrode layer since it would have optimized the charge-discharge capacity of the battery produced.

Art Unit: 1745

With respect to the temperature of forming graphitized VGCF (claims 1, 17, 21, 22, 23, 28 and 29):

Nishimura discloses heating the carbon to temperatures of at least 2000°C (abstract).

The motivation for heating the carbon to temperatures of at least 2000°C is that it enhances the crystallinity of the carbon (col. 2, ll. 15-25 and col. 3, ll. 1-9).

Therefore it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the claimed invention was made to modify the teachings of EP '638 by heating the carbon to temperatures of at least 2000°C since it would have enhanced the crystallinity of the carbon.

With respect to the fibers containing boron in an amount of 0.01-10 mass% (claim 24):

Nishimura discloses that a boron additive is provided during the heat crystallization of the vapor grown carbon fibers as a catalytic material (col. 7, ll. 58-61) with the end carbon product having 0.1 to 10 mass% boron therein (col. 4, ll. 34-38).

The motivation for providing boron in the amount taught by Nishimura and recited in the instant claim is that it provides a catalytic material which enhances the crystallization of the carbon fibers.

Therefore it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the claimed invention was made to modify the teachings of EP '638 by providing boron in the amount taught by Nishimura and recited since it would have provided a catalytic material which enhances the crystallization of the carbon fibers.

With respect to the length of the fibers (claim 26):

Nishimura discloses that the fiber length is preferably no more than 100 microns. And by example when the fiber diameter is 0.01 microns (10 nm) the fiber length is 0.5 microns (col. 6, ll. 13-19).

The motivation for controlling the aspect ratio is that it provides a fiber which has sufficient length to provide good mechanical strength and electrical conductivity along the fibers while providing good dispersability of the fibers in the electrode.

Therefore it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the claimed invention was made to modify the teachings of EP '638 by controlling the aspect ratio since it would have provided a fiber which has sufficient length to provide good mechanical strength and electrical conductivity along the fibers while having also provided good dispersability of the fibers in the electrode.

With respect to the addition of Nishimura to fuel cell electrodes:

Hager discloses using VGCF in either lithium batteries or fuel cells (col. 12, ll. 11-16). Masuko discloses VGCF being useful in both lithium secondary battery electrodes and fuel cell electrodes (para.[0004]). Iijima discloses VGCF being useful in both lithium secondary battery electrodes and fuel cell electrodes (col. 7, ll. 41-48).

Therefore the art establishes of the applicability of VGCF to both lithium electrodes and fuel cell electrodes.

Therefore it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the claimed invention was made to modify the teachings of EP '638 in view of the teachings of Nishimura, since the art establishes that a teaching to VGCF for a lithium electrode and alternatively be employed in fuel cell electrodes.

Art Unit: 1745

3. Claims 19 and 20 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over EP '638 in view of JP '571, Nishimura and either Hager, Masuko or Iijima as applied to claims 17 and 18 above, and further in view of U.S. patent No. 5,861,222 (Fischer).

The difference not yet discussed is of the spaces arrangements of claims 19-20.

Fischer discloses of a gas diffusion layer comprising a bimodal pore distribution and wherein the total porosity of more than 40% to less than 75% is composed of small pores with an average diameter of up to 0.5 microns and large pores with an average diameter of 1 to 20 microns.

The motivation for providing the porosity of Fischer to the gas diffusion layer of EP '638 is that it enhances the diffusive characteristics of the gas diffusion layer while maintaining adequate mechanical strength to the layer.

Therefore it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the claimed invention was made to modify the teachings of EP '638 by providing the porosity of Fischer to the gas diffusion layer of EP '638 since it would have enhanced the diffusive characteristics of the gas diffusion layer while maintained adequate mechanical strength to the layer.

Response to Arguments

4. Applicant argues that Nishimura does not teach or suggest employing the process therein for forming graphitized VGCF in a fuel cell electrode.

The examiner is not persuaded.

As set forth above, the combination of EP '638 and JP '571 teach that the use of VGCF in fuel cell electrodes is known for the purpose of imparting electrical conductivity to the gas diffusion electrode in a fuel cell. Thus the concept of incorporating VGCF would have been known to one of ordinary skill in the art.

Nishimura teaches of a graphitization process for VGCF which, by enhancing the crystallinity of the VGCF (i.e., increasing the degree of graphitization of the VGCF), the conductivity of the VGCF is vastly improved.

Newly cited Hager, Masuko and Iijima establish that teachings of VGCF materials in electrodes of lithium batteries can also be employed in gas diffusion electrodes of fuel cells. Thus while Nishimura itself does not suggest alternative use of the VGCF in fuel cells, one of ordinary skill in the art would have had known that such materials can be alternatively employed in fuel cell electrodes, as shown by either Hager, Masuko or Iijima with reasonable expectation of success.

Thus the combination of EP '638 in view of both JP '571, Nishimura and either Hager, Masuko or Iijima are held to reasonably suggest the claimed invention as set forth above.

Conclusion

5. Applicant's amendment necessitated the new ground(s) of rejection presented in this Office action. Accordingly, **THIS ACTION IS MADE FINAL**. See MPEP § 706.07(a). Applicant is reminded of the extension of time policy as set forth in 37 CFR 1.136(a).

A shortened statutory period for reply to this final action is set to expire THREE MONTHS from the mailing date of this action. In the event a first reply is filed within TWO MONTHS of the mailing date of this final action and the advisory action is not mailed until after the end of the THREE-MONTH shortened statutory period, then the shortened statutory period will expire on the date the advisory action is mailed, and any extension fee pursuant to 37 CFR 1.136(a) will be calculated from the mailing date of the advisory action. In no event, however, will the statutory period for reply expire later than SIX MONTHS from the date of this final action.

Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to Gregg Cantelmo whose telephone number is (571) 272-1283. The examiner can normally be reached on Monday to Thursday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, Pat Ryan, can be reached on (571) 272-1292. The fax phone number for the organization where this application or proceeding is assigned is 703-872-9306. FAXES received after 4 p.m. will not be processed until the following business day. Information regarding the status of an application may be obtained from the Patent Application Information Retrieval (PAIR) system. Status information for published applications may be obtained from either Private PAIR or Public PAIR. Status information for unpublished applications is available through Private PAIR only. For more information about the PAIR system, see <http://pair-direct.uspto.gov>. Should you have questions on access to the Private PAIR system, contact the Electronic Business Center (EBC) at 866-217-9197 (toll-free).

Application/Control Number: 10/049,188
Art Unit: 1745

Page 12

Gregg Cantelmo
Primary Examiner
Art Unit 1745

gc

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gregg Cantelmo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

September 14, 2005